Introduction

Life on the earth is dynamic. Everything that is born under the Sun must decay and die, and be born again in one or the other form; like a circle. So is the human society; a new society is born out of old one. It is evolving with the changing time. With the changing time, we human beings must move on and adapt new world. Every season teaches us how human being should wear new life like the spring; each spring is the result of decay. Even a hardest stone is melted, carved or is vanished by wind, rain and sunlight in the course of time. But, the human being, animal with wisdom, wit and intelligentsia, always endeavors to stabilize the change for his selfish reasons. His desire to control everything has affected the life circle so much that he has everything with him yet is unable to enjoy it. He has tied himself by too many dos and don’ts. These rules are justified and sustained by religions. He has lost an opportunity of living with the other co-existing creatures equally by elevating himself to higher category. He not only rules the rest of the world, but he also rules his fellow human being in the name of colour, caste, class and creed. All these actions are regulated by religious doctrines. In short, man created religion to gain salvation, but ended up in chaining himself to desires. He made religion to rule, unfortunately, he himself is ruled by it.

Caste and class are the cruelest remains of undated Hindu religion. Perhaps, the ‘varna’ system came into existence to serve a good purpose of human life in social structure in a given time. But, today it has lost its currency; changing time has brought human beings so near that the ‘varna’ system is no more relevant. Yet, in order to maintain the superiority on other fellow humans, upper strata of our society is not able give it up. Caste system has rooted so deeply that it has become a herculean task to uproot it. The lowest strata of ‘varna’ and unrecognized groups of Indian tribes have been victims of this cruel set up. They have been bound by
these religious dogmas that have captivated these people of lowest strata. They have been fighting for their equal rights of life since centuries. Many heroes have sacrificed their lives to liberate these neglected or captivated people. But, it is colonial period of Indian history that created a situation where different civilizations had to face each other and learn human values. During this time, the people who were captivated by religious regulations, claimed their freedom from all clutches and called themselves Dalits.

In the early and middle of the twentieth century, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar gave a new dimension to the cause of Dalits. He questioned every established religious norm that allowed the inhuman treatment of Dalits, and set the discourse of Dalits’ liberation in every sense. He taught dalits the ways to fight for social and political justice. Further, in post-independence era, he prepared the Constitution which pledges for the equal opportunity and justice to all.

After Ambedkar, Dalits were amassed into a cultural movement called Dalit Movement, which not only triumphed the Dalit’s identity but also created a collective Dalit community consciousness. It was sparked in Maharashtra, and then it spread to the rest of the country. Many organizations like Dalit Panther, Dalita Sangarsha Samiti and Bheema Sena etc., led the movement and brought marvelous changes in Indian society. Dalits got united to fight against the caste oppression, claimed political and economical rights and social equality. They were united even in factories through various Communist organizations.

Meanwhile, Dalits worked hard to realize the dreams of Dr. Ambedkar. They excavated every possible way to motivate Dalits to participate in the cultural movement and make it a big success. Literature was one such way that inspired both the writer and the readers. The words uttered by leaders and activists were
registered in black and white, they were copied and sent to every corner of the
country. Initially it was Ambedkar’s literature that influenced many Dalits to come
up with their own literature. Later, the second generation too got inspired by
Ambedkarite thoughts and started to inspire the masses through their literature.
People wrote poems, plays, essays, editorials, newsletters, books, magazines, short
stories and novels. Apart from those forms, it was autobiography that caught the
Dalits’ experiences well organized. Dalit autobiographies stunned the whole
literary world with their unusual expression and style.

Dalit autobiographies broke all traditional boundaries with their sharp
language, maverick form and quite realistic expressions. They depicted life as it
was. Their inhuman life story was caught in the words. Other Dalits who read these
autobiographies found it very similar to their own lives. They started to associate
themselves with the rest of the Dalits who faced untouchability. The experience of
untouchability formed a common thread among Dalits. Hence, Dalit literature, in
particular autobiography, played a vital role in creating collective consciousnesses
of Dalits.

The outcome of Dalit movement was to bring in complete change in the
social order through collective consciousness of dalits, and literature was roped in
as an agent of change. The change in the social hierarchy was much needed one for
Indian subalterns in the post-Independent India as colonial power did not vanish
from the lives of Dalits. The independence was mere an exchange of power from
the British to upper caste and landlords. Therein, Dalits had less hopes of
independence within this free country. The idea of change was considered to be
null and void, because any change logically entails contradictions. It is the change
or progress that marks modernity. A modern aspect comes to existence at the cost
of previous or orthodox elements. Hence, those who enjoyed the caste privileges
never wanted to have modernity in the lives of Dalits. The change would make them unsettled as modernity would emancipate the lives of Dalits by dismantling the class distinctions.

With humongous efforts by individuals, organizations and institutions, Dalits were able to see the change in various domains. Dalits embraced the changes not on red carpet; it was constant struggle. The fruit modernity was not easy, it brought great pangs. Yet, undeterred Dalits faced challenges of caste and class at every step. The struggle between Dalits and upper caste people, one for freedom another for power, had to clash with time and again for their own cause. In this context, Marx says:

History of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight; a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (Marx and Engels 1)

In the history of human civilization, such struggle for existence existed always; sometimes it was latent, sometimes overt. But the Dalit movement was so overt and loud that human history cannot forget it. It was a long process of human liberation from the slavery.

One important aspect was the root cause for the struggle between the classes and castes; awakened Dalit consciousness. The awareness of one’s own plight will certainly makes one unsettled. If a slave is not reminded or made feel that he is not
subjugated but slavery is his duty, he will never come out of it. He does his ‘duty’ without any fuss. Because, it is the concept of ‘karma’ which makes him feel comfortable within his slavery job even in harsh situation. His plight is supported by religion that preaches hierarchy of caste by his birth, religious scriptures compel him to accept his identity as a slave of upper caste. But, with the efforts of men from ages, like Buddha, Basava and Ambedkar toiled and sacrificed their lives to abolish authenticated slavery of human beings.

Due to the colonial powers, Dalits realized that there is another world where human beings are treated equally irrespective of their birth stigma. Education was the major tool for Dalits to gain knowledge as they were kept away from literacy since centuries. Ambedkar became the messiah of Dalits by dedicating himself to learn as much as possible. As a result, he produced literature that struck the minds of Dalits and created scuffle. For the first time slaves were told that they were slaves. This made Dalits realize that they are not free, but enslaved by caste system which has kept them away from seeking truth.

The sudden jolt in Dalits mind made them aware of their plight which demanded immediate fight back. They were made conscious of their needs and duties. They started to ‘identify’ themselves as Dalits; a section of the society whose existence is totally erased. All Dalits across India came together to claim their righteous existence through political, economical and social rights. Sherif and Sherif believe:

It is a social movement . . . a formative stage of interaction in human relations. It expresses an ongoing process. Further, a social movement is always possessed by a sense of mission. Hence, attention is focused on the 'interaction' of the conscious, striving human beings as part of an 'emergent collectivity' which is the ‘social movement’. This is not the study of stable
groups and institutions but of groups and institutions in the process of becoming. (Sherif and Sherif 722-24)

Education, unity, and heinous experience of untouchability made to embrace aggressively the identity ‘Dalit’; it was not mere group but it was ideological reply to caste system. The word is used in the place of caste denotative names and with positive pitch.

Dalits expressed their anguish, desire, dreams and identity through literature. It was completely influenced by the Movement led in Maharashtra during 1960’s. Along with it, in 1970’s it spread to Karnataka too. But it was Marathi Dalit writers who caused great influence on Kannada Dalit writers through their protest literature. A literature having such an interesting and contemporary issues to talk about, has been neglected by the academic world of our country for a long time. A study in Dalit literature is perhaps the immediate need of the hour.

As a researcher, I had the task of selecting an area of research which is relevant to contemporary context, and also unexplored or less explored. In recent times in academic research, scholars have tried their hand in every area irrespective of domains. So, it was great difficulty as well as matter of concern to choose the area. But, for a serious and valid research work, it is better to know one’s interest first. The interest lies within the realm of one’s experience. Therefore, the subject attracted the attention due to social concerns.

Dalit literature is not being interrogated to the extent which it deserves; it is not explored properly in academic domain; many of Indian universities have not prescribed Dalit literary works in their syllabi; the literary reviews are very rare. It is either thought to be not relevant area or neglected deliberately, it looks a bit political. Dalit literature is denied of critical appreciation due to its ‘inability’ to
follow the literary canon. Its language, narration, agenda and forms are rejected citing that it can’t be literature at all. Therefore, Dalit literature is not much talked about, and it provides a proper platform to a researcher in order seek different dimensions in it, and research is much needed.

The applicability of my research is valid one. In recent days, particularly from the last decade, the question Dalits’ role in developing India is debated a lot; politically and economically. Government policies, social changes due to global communications, and political issue have heightened the importance of Dalits’ participation in every sphere as we are moving towards social inclusiveness. Government policies are made keeping Dalits and poor in view; policies are striving to reach each and everyone equally irrespective of one’s caste and class. The changing economical scenario is open to all; Dalits get better opportunity in modernization process. And most importantly, in political arena Dalits are targeted to woo them for vote bank. For instance, the voice for Dalit chief ministers in the states like, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, has sparked the political debate on the questions of Dalit identity.

Rhetorical questions like, who is Dalit? Do Dalits only can work for the emancipation of the poor? Do we really need a Dalit chief minister when we try to walk out caste ridden society? All these questions and political discourse prompted me to take up the Dalit literature for research. To answer them, Limbale says, “To start with, there will have to be a definite explanation of the word ‘Dalit’ in Dalit literature. Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not only Dalits, term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to
be included” (*Dalit Literature* 30). Here, the questions may not be resolved directly, but certainly they are the concern of the research work; Dalit literature is the outcome of such rhetorical questions. Such questions and issues are not new to us, they have been existing since our country’s independence. Whenever there were attempts to bring Dalits to mainstream, oppressor always tried every means to suppress them. With constant churning of ideas and actions, Dalits are able to voice out the issues openly. That saga of oppressed voice is expressed in literature vehemently. Two form of literature helped Dalits to express their experience and views; poetry and autobiography. But autobiography has become a synonym of Dalit literature as it displays, it is led by Dalits. The form allows Dalits to register their life stories from objective point of view by providing historical facts; it also provides the space for the unbiased narrative.

The research thesis title: “Identity Crisis and Modernity in the Dalit Autobiographies of Siddalingaiah, Aravind Malagatti, Laxman Gaikwad and Sharankumar Limbale” gives me an opportunity to concentrate on the autobiographical form written by Dalits as a result of Dalit Movement. There are many Dalit autobiographies in India, yet only four autobiographies are selected. It does not mean that other autobiographies are left as they lack one’s attention or critical merits; it is just a matter convenient from research point of view. In order to provide a limitation and disciplined framework, the above mentioned works are being selected.

There are few elements that determine the limitations and the framework of the research project. These elements play a key role in selecting the primary sources and the title as well. All the four autobiographies are set in the backdrop of Dalit movement in India, in other words, all the four works are the result of Dalit movement. They are written to tell the stories of the Movement and the authors’
association with it. Their Dalit experience during 1960’s and 80’s shaped their autobiographical forms; their history moulded their personality, so their autobiographies.

Contemporariness is one more factor that influenced the selection of the four autobiographies. Siddalingaiah, Malagatti, Gaikwad and Limbale are contemporaries who are living in the same age, but variations in experiences. All of them lived in a same age, felt the same heat of Dalit movement, read same literature and experienced a common national discourse. Their school days were set in 1960’s and 1970’s, went to college during 1980’s and involved in historical Dalit movement with the same motivation. So, from research perspective, all these writers fit into a single lineage of historical and cultural context. This enables the research work to analyze the texts on common ground.

Translation is another important factor that determines the research project. Though Dalit autobiographies were written decades back, they reached little reading fraternity due to four reasons; first, most of the autobiographies are written in vernacular languages, second, only literate could afford them, third, they were kept out of academics, fourth, Dalit autobiographies were treated as though they written only for Dalits. Sometimes they were not considered to be literature at all. Therefore, translation of such works into English and other languages did not happen for many years. There are many Dalit autobiographies in Kannada that are not translated yet, except two; *Government of Brahmana* and *Ooru Keri*. The present research is left with two Dalit autobiographies translated into English.

In order to provide equal strength to the research work two Marathi Dalit autobiographies; *The Branded* and *The Outcaste*, are selected keeping in mind the above mentioned first two factors. Laxman Gaikwad and Sharankumar Limbale are
the contemporaries of Siddalingaiah and Aravind Malagatti, whose autobiographies *The Branded* and *The Outcaste*, respectively, are being translated into English during 1990’s. For the current research, Marathi autobiographies are relevant as the research in Dalit literature without reference to Marathi Dalit literature is incomplete. Dalit literature first emerged to its fullest form in Marathi, and then it spread to other parts. Therefore, two Marathi Dalit autobiographies are selected for the research project.

A researcher’s personal affinity or interest in a given research work is a positive note, at the same time it should be taken care that personal biases are not interfering. A researcher must keep a well measured distance from subjectivity by interpreting the texts from objective point of view. One’s personal experience and wisdom should be used in a constructive manner in order to support the research process. In this context, untouchability is a common factor among the four authors, but it does not influence or gain upper hand while discussing the primary sources. It is a sincere attempt to discern through the truth hidden in the Dalit autobiographies.

Having said so, the amalgamation of personal interest in Dalit literature, relevance of the study and its applicability to current situation, sparked the idea of taking up Dalit autobiographies in particular. Autobiography is a genre that portrays numerous incidents of author’s life personal, political and social in a co-ordinated style. While understanding a historical event like Dalit movement, realistic piece of literary works becomes very relevant, an autobiography is more close to self than any other genre. Though there is difficulty in writing an autobiography, it still holds strong ground in exploring the truth. A Dalit autobiography narrates author’s struggles along with historical development of his contemporary times. Thus, Dalit autobiographies are relevant in this study.
The present research work, “Identity Crisis and Modernity in the Dalit Autobiographies of Siddalingaiah, Aravind Malagatti, Laxman Gaikwad and Sharankumar Limbale” aims to find out two major elements in all the four Dalit autobiographies; Dalits’ identity crisis and modernity in Dalits’ lives. While establishing the argument, the historical development of autobiography as a genre, and the place of Dalit autobiographies among other Indian autobiographies are discussed at length in four chapters.

For the sake of convenience, thesis is structured into four chapters, in which an attempt is made to analyze the texts from socio-cultural perspective. The select autobiographies open huge treasure of information where wide range of research work is possible. Yet, I have confined myself to two major aspects; identity crisis and modernity. An attempt is made to provide a link between both the identity crisis and modernity. In a sense they are interlinked. When Dalits became aware of their identity related issues, they made every possible attempt to enter the modern world. Modernity came to them through education, job opportunity, migration and various government policies. And when modernity was confronted by Dalits, they faced hardship due to their caste and class identities. So, throughout the thesis there is a constant effort to bring out these mutually affecting elements in the four autobiographies.

At this juncture of introduction, few issues need to be clarified. Certain terminologies incorporated in the thesis are not absolute and predetermined in their meaning; their stand is adopted to suit the context. It is well known fact that language is not stagnant due to its dynamic nature. A language used in certain context loses its currency in other context. Sometimes words may lose or gain meaning due to various influential factors on the language usage. In this regard, the title “Identity Crisis and Modernity in the Dalit Autobiographies of Siddalingaiah,
Aravind Malagatti, Laxman Gaikwad and Sharankumar Limbale” demands some explanation. The words used here need to be understood in the backdrop of Dalit literature.

At the outset, the word ‘Dalit’ is being used in various ways in different contexts, it is used for all the oppressed classes of India. Earlier it was used to all depressed classes like SC and ST, later during Dalit movement its horizon was expanded to include women, various unscheduled tribes, some sections of minority communities, X genders and to some extends a section of Japanese society were taken under the huge umbrella called ‘Dalit’. But with growing interpretations and conceptualization process, now it is confined to SC and STs.

Autobiography is a literary genre which is used by wide range of individuals across the globe. An autobiography is a life story of an individual, written by him. There are two important things to be observed; it will have first person narration and the signature of the author. Therefore, it is considered to be the most authentic piece of literary work. Again it is not exempted from the demerits, and the merits and demerits of the genre are discussed in the first chapter.

Identity is done in two possible ways; one by others, another by oneself. First one is given by others; second one is taken what is already given. In Indian social hierarchy, the first identity stigmatizes the caste identity of Dalits; latter one internalizes and drives the inferiority of among Dalits. Though the word had psychological denotation, contextually it is concerned with socio-cultural issues. Here, identity crisis does not mean a psychological disorder, but it is a socio-cultural condition of human beings based on caste and class strata. Thus, present research work does not include psycho-analysis to evaluate the select autobiographies. Whole of Dalit literature aims to claim Dalit identity through
experience in which each writer believes to say, “When I discover who I am, I’ll be free” (Smith 137). This section involves the ‘destruction’ and ‘construction’ of the complex process of Dalit identity formation.

Modernity is another term that requires little explanation. First of all, the term ‘modernity’ should be distinguished from ‘modernism’. Modernity is a change or shift from old to new or orthodoxy to heterodox, and it is marked by an obvious and sudden break through. Modernity is a process of modernization or, it is a time span marked by contemporary ideas and thoughts. On one hand, modernity is seen through some elements that represent a shift. On other hand, modernism is dominated by modernity in the form of ideas, thoughts, art, philosophy and cultural movement. In this context, particularly in fourth chapter, modernity is measured through few elements like education, urbanization, homogenization of communities, standard of living, and breaking of orthodox clutches. Such elements are found in the four autobiographies and are critically evaluated to see how Dalits embraced or confronted the modernity in their lives.

Throughout the thesis only few literary texts are taken into consideration while discussing the historical development of the autobiographical genre. The exclusion of other texts does not undermine their essence and relevance. In the first and the second chapters only selected memoirs and autobiographies are taken into consideration to form a base to my further arguments. After analyzing the other critics’ reflections on those works, they are being selected for this context. Everything under the Sun cannot be taken into consideration, and unknowingly some important issues or texts would have been left out, but they are not of less importance.
The above mentioned aspects, issues, ideas and terms are analyzed in detail in the respective chapters. But, let me confess that the proposed arguments are not ultimate; it is just an attempt to look at Dalit autobiographies from different perspectives. The ideas or arguments are not to claim an ultimatum; they are subjected to changes and amendments.

Different methods are being used to conduct the research effectively. In literature it is difficult to stick to one particular methodology as it does not have strict parameters or applied methods. The data does not require experimental or hypothetical results because literature is always subjective matter not objective one. Therefore, the research conducted here includes an amalgamation of different methodologies like literary survey method, comparative method and also interview method. In order to pile up the primary and secondary information, different ways are used; library visit is the major one. Required sources information are consulted, and are gathered to support the research project.

With information gathered, it became clear that there is still need for the research in Dalit literature. It does not mean that there is no critical output, but the existing critical appreciation of Dalit literature is in vernacular languages. Baburao Bagul, Namdeo Dasal, Kancha Ilaiah, Arjun Dagle, B. M. Puttaiah, D. R. Naragaj, V. T. Rajashekhar Shetty have toiled in order to bring Dalit literature to the mainstream literature. In English, the process of elevating was initiated by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot through the publication of *An Anthology of Dalit Literature: Poems*. N. M. Aston, Susie Tharu, K. Sathyanarayana, Raj Kumar and many more have taken the recent developments in Dalit literature to the global. Still, there is an urgent need of researchers attention towards Dalit literature particularly Dalit autobiographies.
The above mentioned scholars and stalwarts have contributed to Dalit on literature in general sense. There are only few and countable research works done Dalit autobiographies in English Language. It will be judgmental position to claim that there is less research on Dalit autobiographies, but certainly the genre needs more critical insights and evaluation. Therefore, the present research work will add on to the existing critical evaluation of Dalit autobiographies.

Overall, the thesis tries to critically evaluate the autobiographies of Siddalingaiah, Aravind Malagatti, Laxman Gaikwad and Sharankumar Limbale in terms of their authors’ identity crisis and assertion, and modernity that connects all the four autobiographies. Having considered the historical background, the Dalit movement, the present study would contribute to the existing corpus. There is a need for constant reminding of Dalit history in order to keep track of progress in Dalit literature. As V. T. Rajeshekar Shetty critically observes, “Revolutionaries like Shyamsunder are seldom born in Hindu India… But senseless as we are, we curse them when they live but worship them after they die” (Shetty 19). I hope this work is going to be a minimal attribution to Dalit literature as it needs more and more critical evaluations.
References


